

John 20.19-23; Acts 2.1-21
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Acts 2:1-21

¹ When the day of Pentecost had come, [the apostles] were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Fellow Jews and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ 'In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit,
and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

John 20.19-23

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Here we are, all together in one place,
 on the Day of Pentecost.
 Except for the walk to Emmaus,
 it feels like we've been
 with the first disciples,
 behind closed doors
 for the entire Easter season.
 We've shared their feelings
 of grief and fear,
 dismay and confusion
 and powerlessness.
 We've noticed the bowls and towels
 that were set aside
 after Jesus washed their feet.
 We've remembered him saying
 the one, non-negotiable command —
 that we love each other
 the same way he loves us
 — a communion
 of mutual love and service.

We also heard all his promises
 of the Holy Spirit:
 as the Spirit of truth who will teach us;
 the holy Comforter;
 our companion;
 our advocate and guide.

And now the moment has arrived!
 This is *that* day!
 But *which* day?
 There are two different stories
 and they happen on different days!
 One is the evening of the day of resurrection,
 and the other is the day of Pentecost —
 50 days later.

They're different in other ways too.
 One is as quiet and intimate
 as a lover's breath
 breathed on our cheeks;
 the other is as loud and chaotic
 as a howling wind and fire.

You know what this reminds me of?
 The two different stories of creation!

One is a cosmic voice —
 the wind of a big bang
*(like a giant B-flat organ pipe)*¹,
 and humanity was created
 on the 6th day —
 after the earth, sky, sea,
 and all the
 more-than-human creatures.

The other story is gentle²,
 a tender moment
 of God shaping a creature
 out of dust
 and breathing
 the breath of life into it
 with a kiss —
 and humanity was
 the first of God's creations.

All these stories!

Creation and Pentecost.
 God's holy Spirit
 is very *elemental* —
 fire and wind and
 breath and spirit,
 cosmic and intimate.

It seems the Spirit showing up
 is an on-going process
 and has many different,
 even opposite,
 manifestations.

Creation is still happening everywhere,
 all around us.

Happening *in us*.

The Spirit brings life
 where there is no life.

Jesus shows them
 the marks of death
 in his hands and his side
 even as he breathes into them

¹ Marcello plays the big B-flat pedal

² Marcello plays the Zimbelstern stop

the breath of life.
 And along with that breath of life
 he speaks words of peace.
 While they were still at the last-supper table,
 Jesus promised peace
 along with the Holy Spirit.
 He promised *his* peace,
 a peace that's unlike any peace
 the world can give.

Now, while he breathes the Spirit of life
 and his peace into them,
 he sends them out
 to be instruments of peace
 in the world.
 Again, it's all for the sake of the world.
 He says: *just as the Father sent me,*
I send you.
 It hearkens back to John 3:16,
God loved the world in this way,
God sent the only son.
 So Jesus sends his disciples,
 filled with the Holy Spirit
 and his peace,
 into the world
 to bring peace
 through forgiveness of sin.

This verse is the only place
 in John's Gospel
 where the word "forgive" appears.
 And sadly, English translations
 have made a mess of it,
 which makes it a troublesome verse
 instead of the beautiful message it holds.
 Honestly, when I read this text last Monday,
 I considered invoking preacher's prerogative
 and leaving this verse out.
 But now I'm glad I didn't.
 Because, in a commentary
 by Cody Sanders (a professor with Luther Seminary),
 I learned something about it
 that I never knew.

Or if I *did* learn it before,
I forgot.

"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them;
is great.

In the second half of the verse, though,
translators tend to use *their* prerogative
in a way that,
I don't think,
is faithful to the Jesus
of the rest of the book.

In Greek, the word "sin"
doesn't appear in

the second half of the verse at all.

Translators have to decide
what to do with the "*they*"
in that part of the sentence.

Does "*they*" refer back to
the *person* who is forgiven,
or does it refer to the *sins*?

And "retain" isn't
the best translation
of "*krateo*" either.
"Hold" would be more true
to the Greek.

In his commentary,
Professor Sanders quotes Mary Coloe
who makes a literal translation this way,
*"If, of anyone, you hold,
they have been held."*

And another translation by Sandra Schneiders:
"Whoever you hold, they are held fast."

They both make the "*they*"
refer back to the person
rather than the sin,
so that we,
the community
who proclaims forgiveness of sin,
are to hold that forgiven one carefully
and faithfully
in the community —
and never discard them
or throw them out.

This makes sense
 according to everything else
 we know about Jesus
 in John's gospel.
 He's all about *creating* community
 and *restoring* people to community.
 He prays for us all to be one
 as he and God are one.
 Never does he condemn or punish or exclude anyone.
 Instead, he releases people
 from whatever holds them captive.

Here we are, all together in one place,
 on our Day of Pentecost —
 the day we receive the ever-present,
 ever-flowing Holy Spirit's breath —
 wind, fire,
 peace, and tender love.

The day the stories of
 Pentecost and Creation collide
 to initiate a whole new creation,
 of us,
 of the church,
 of the world into which we are sent
 with the breath of life
 and power of forgiveness.

While Jesus breathes his Spirit
 of life and his peace into us,
 he sends *us* out.
 He sends us with his one,
 non-negotiable command —
 that we love each other
 the same way he loves us
 in a communion
 of mutual love and service.
 He sends us to be instruments
 of forgiveness and
 restoration of relationships
 and *peace* —
 peace unlike any peace
 the world can give.
 He sends us as God sent him.
 Because, after all,

it's all for the sake of the world.